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RESULTS OF PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

BY JAMES H. HYSLOP

In 1882 the English Society for Psychical Research was organized amidst the general ridicule of the scientific world. Materialism and agnosticism were so strong from the triumphs of physical science that residual phenomena of any kind were either discredited or explained away by all sorts of pseudo-theories. The Spiritualists had assumed a contemptuous attitude ever since Swedenborg, whom they would have done better to have followed or to have improved upon by better experiments. The Church shied at the subject because it had been defeated, in so many efforts to defend its dogmas, by the constant victories of physical science, until it distrusted the very method of science. The Philosophers looked down on the subject with that benign contempt which that class has always shown toward the work of experiment, and rested easy in the comforts of an idealism which physical science neither understood nor respected; which the philosopher himself could not make intelligible, and which the man of the world rejected with a shrug of the shoulders. For a long period of history, Philosophy had complete control of all human knowledge, until she divided the patrimony among the special sciences who were her children, and who usurped for themselves the domination of the world leaving to their mother, in the language of Lotze, as her dower's right, the insoluble problems of the universe.

It was in the midst of all this opposition and ridicule that a small group of Englishmen organized the Society for Psychical Research. They were such men as Professor Henry Sidgwick of Cambridge University, England, Mr. Frederic W. H. Myers, Professor Balfour Stewart, Professor (now Sir) William F. Barrett, Professor (now Sir) Oliver J. Lodge, Arthur James Balfour, afterwards Prime Minister of England, and a host of Continental asso-

ciates of similar scientific standing. These men went about their work with the spirit and method of science, collecting data alleging some supernormal character. Prior to their time and efforts, stories were rife and would not down about haunted houses, apparitions, thought transference, marvelous results under the influence of hypnotism, and alleged communication with the dead. The Society set about collecting well accredited statements regarding personal experiences in these fields, and in the meantime it prosecuted experiments to test the claims of thought transference, which it named telepathy. It also collected a large mass of coincidental experiences associated with dying persons. After some years' work, it announced that it regarded telepathy as proved and that apparitions, such as it recorded, were not due to chance.

On these results the members of the Society, official and lay, were fairly well agreed. But when it came to mediumistic phenomena, some of which were investigated in the course of this work, they were not so well agreed. Mr. Myers, on the basis of large powers for the subconscious, and of mediumistic phenomena which he did not publish, adopted the belief in survival after death. Dr. Hodgson on the avowed evidence of communication with the dead, accepted the same belief. The same was true of Sir Oliver Lodge and later of Sir William Barrett. Other leaders of the work have not publicly announced their belief in spiritism, though they hold it privately. But there is no aggressive tendency on the part of any of them to urge the hypothesis or to make any progress on the basis of it.

If it had not been for the absurd talk about telepathy by people who ought to have had more scientific intelligence, there would have been much more general progress in psychic research. I do not mean progress in collecting facts, but in the interpretation of such as have been collected. Telepathy has been a universal solvent of mysteries for every man who has been afraid to admit anything that really explains. This habit has prevailed ever since the attack on Mesmer. When they could not dispute Mesmer's facts they disputed his theory by an appeal to the imagination. Scientific men were right enough in disputing his fluidic theory, but it would have been infinitely wiser to have confessed ignorance than to have set up the imagination in the place of a fluid. They soon discovered

this when Braid brought forward "suggestion" as the potent charm to explain everything, when, in fact, it explained nothing. But the very fact that no one knew what it meant gave it security against refutation. You cannot deny what you do not understand. Consequently, as a solvent of mysteries for people who could not think, "suggestion" has had no rivals. You could hold the plebs at bay with it while you postponed the day of judgment.

It was precisely the same with telepathy. Many researchers recognized at the outset that the claims of the Spiritualists had to be investigated and it was a part of the avowed object to do this. But they took an attitude of hostility toward Spiritualism and sought first those phenomena by which they hoped to explain away the theory of the Spiritualists, though professing to be searching for evidence of a future life! So biased was the spirit with which they set about their work that Mr. Myers definitely stated in his great work, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, that so far from defending Spiritualism, it was a criticism of that doctrine, though he announced the same conclusion! There was, of course, enough that was contemptible in the Spiritualists' claims to invoke this opposition and it was as much as a man's scientific life was worth to show any mercy to that school. It was its own fault that it received so little sympathy. Even if a man believed it to be true, it was not safe to admit it, and the only course open to an intelligent man was to ignore it and to deal with other problems of the supernatural.

The consequence was that the investigators first attacked the problems of thought transference and in the course of some years of work announced that telepathy had been proved. From being mental coincidences between living minds that excluded chance coincidence and normal sense perception, and connected with the present mental states of agent and percipient, the advocates of it began to extend its meaning to the process of A selecting from the subconscious of B whatever was necessary for impersonating the dead.

Now there is no evidence whatever for any such process. There has been even no attempt to investigate such a process or to prove it as a fact. It has been assumed as possible; and then having dwelt on its possibility for

purposes of controversy, the mind has come to believe it to be a fact! And this is called scientific procedure! Of course, it is "possible" that the subconscious may be an agent in affecting the mind of the medium. But there are so many other "possibilities" that these kill themselves off. We must have evidence for a *fact*, and there is no evidence for subconscious agency of one living mind on another, and it is hard to see how you can prove that the subconscious is a telepathic agent because we can never tell what the subconscious is doing. But assume that we can. Not much progress is made with that. For the real thing to be explained is the fact that this subconscious of the psychic always selects the right facts from the subconscious of the living for proving the personal identity of the dead, facts to be transmitted to the medium and then delivered back to the sitter as messages from the dead, the subconscious fooling either itself or the normal consciousness of the sitter, whose subconsciousness supposedly knows no better!

But then the stretching of the hypothesis does not stop here. Many of the facts delivered as messages are not known by the sitter either consciously or subconsciously and can be proved not to have been known. I shall not take the trouble here to illustrate or prove this, but facts of this type exist by the thousand. You cannot use the hypothesis of telepathic access to the subconscious of the sitter in such instances, as the data are not there for transmission or selection. So our *soi-disant* scientific people, with out any evidence whatever, now stretched telepathy to cover these new facts and assumed that it could reach out into the whole world of living consciousness and select the right person for obtaining the desired information, select from his or her subconscious the proper incidents which the sitter does not know, and then after this intelligent process palm the facts off as spirit messages, knowing how it gets them and lying about where it gets them! There are no mechanical analogies in any such assumed process. You could not assume that the person or persons from whom such information was filched were either consciously or subconsciously thinking of or trying to transmit the needed facts. The whole process has to be selectively initiated and carried out by the medium.

Now there is no scientific evidence whatever for any

such process. As already asserted, all that we know is that there are coincidences between living minds that exclude chance and normal perception, and whether they are direct transmissions between living minds or intermediated by spirits, no one knows. We know only the facts and telepathy is but a name for those facts, not a name for any causal process whatever. The consequence is that it can no more be used for explanation of the facts than chemical affinity can.

Now, all along in this collection of data there has been an increasing mass of facts consistent with the hypothesis of communication with the dead, to say nothing more of it, and that hypothesis coincides with all the scientific and ethical theories of human consciousness, while the so-called telepathic theory has no causal or ethical implications whatever. What I have shown of the assumptions that have to be made,—and these without evidence—in extending telepathy, indicates clearly a perfectly topsy-turvy condition of things. The hypothesis cannot be made responsible for any scientific laws or limitations whatever. But the spiritistic theory, in so far as it is based on phenomena of personal identity, is practically intelligible and appeals to well known laws of nature. Telepathy is an appeal to the unknown and thus violates the first condition of a scientific explanation. We do not know any process whatever in connection with the phenomena of telepathy and so cannot use it for scientific explanations. It is quite otherwise with the spiritistic theory where the facts illustrate personal identity. In the first place, we explain the actions of a living person by the action of consciousness on the organism. In conversation with a man, we interpret his vocal statements, not as blind, unconscious and mechanical actions, but as evidence of associated intelligence. Wherever the evidence is sufficient, we infer intelligence in connection with certain facts. Now, that particular person with whom we were conversing dies and his body dissolves. No more actions occur in connection with his bodily organism from which I can infer the continuance of that consciousness. But suppose that I go to another living organism whose consciousness never knew the facts about my friend, and the incidents of his last conversation are all detailed over again to me, why should I not suppose or infer that the same consciousness is instigating them

that I would infer with the living organism? On the one hand, the proved fact of telepathy, whatever the process, would make this possible, assuming that consciousness actually did survive and only awaited favorable conditions for communication, and we might legitimately suppose that the facts were evidence of the survival, without any appeal to a process to account for them or to make them intelligible.

Now when we say "spirit" in such a situation we do not mean a quasi-material form, as usually imagined, but we mean the continuance of the consciousness or stream of consciousness which we once knew, and now infer, to explain certain movements and actions of a given organism. We are not setting up an unknown process, such as telepathy is. We are inferring the same mental states that we knew operative at a former time, and, if in the living it be the nature or the capacity of consciousness to cause movements or sensory pictures in the mind, why may not the same power be active after death; and when a suitable organism or set of conditions is found in the living, why may not the same consciousness produce the same effects? In both the conception of the process and the appeal to persistence of consciousness we are using the known to explain the facts. The appeal to telepathy is to the wholly unknown as a process. The facts are nothing but mental states and as such are not special types of phenomena individually considered. It is the absence of normal stimuli that is striking. The consequence is that we shall not be in any position to understand telepathic coincidences until we ascertain the special process by which they are produced. If telepathically induced mental states represented individual phenomena of a special type different in nature from ordinary mental states, the discovery of a special process would not be so important. Any other associated event or agent might suffice to explain it. But telepathy is but a name for a coincidence between phenomena which, individually and in normal conditions, are perfectly familiar, and it is the coincidence that is unusual, not the mental state. Consequently we must know what the process is that establishes the coincidence, to understand it. But it is precisely this process that is totally unknown. So far as we know, the process might be the action of spirits as messengers for carrying the thoughts of one living person to an-

other. We have no evidence that any such thing occurs, and it would involve a complicated process to effect it in this way. The habit of science is to take the direct course for explanation instead of the indirect, unless the evidence points to the indirect one. Hence, I do not refer to the possibility of spirit agency in telepathy as if it were a fact, but only to exhibit our ignorance of the real process, and it is that ignorance which forbids the use of "telepathy" to explain anything whatever. It remains a name for facts which still seek an explanation.

But concede that telepathy actually explains the mental coincidences, or that we know the process by which it is effected, this would not help us in the least in such facts as point to the action of spirits in communicating. As I have already indicated, telepathy assumes that A acts on B. But the phenomena which illustrate the personal identity of the dead must be represented as B *selecting from A and all living consciousness* the facts necessary to impersonate the dead. That is a totally different phenomenon and must have a like different explanation. There is nothing selective about the ordinarily assumed telepathy. There is the natural selectiveness of mind in the phenomena which represent the survival of human consciousness and it is the selectiveness of a mind distinct from the mind or minds assumed as the source in the hypothesis of telepathy. The interest in the selection, the connections and associations manifested in it, the variations from the natural interests and associations of the sitter, the disregard of the sitter's expectations and wishes, the evidence that the sitter's present mental states are ignored, are all incompatible with any form of telepathy whatever, except one which does nothing but duplicate the facts which illustrate the personal identity of the dead, and there is not one iota of scientific evidence for any such process. It can have no standing without such evidence.

I shall challenge any scientific man to dispute these statements, and they must be disputed in order to purchase any favor whatever for telepathy as a rival of spiritistic theories. The fact is, telepathy has never received any support whatever except such as is due to the respectability of scepticism against spirits. It would not be tolerated in any intelligent scientific court. The evidence and the scientific character of the explanation is all on the

other side, and as a consequence of this and the voluminous mass of facts, I shall not even present here any of the evidence for spiritistic theory. I exclude from that evidence, of course, all physical phenomena and such as do not illustrate the personal identity of deceased persons. They are subject to further investigation for their alliances and might possibly be explicable by spirits, but are not evidence of such causes. At this date, however, I consider the spiritistic theory as so well proved scientifically that I regard every man who does not admit it simply as either ignorant or prejudiced. Schopenhauer said practically the same thing in 1850.

In this verdict I do not exclude the right to be perplexed about the explanation of the processes by which the evidence is secured. Most people wish to understand phenomena or to understand the process of communication or to have some knowledge of the life hereafter before they will admit that the existence of spirits has been proved. This is absolutely absurd. We cannot explain or understand anything until after we have proved it to be a fact. We cannot demand that we shall explain how we communicate with spirits before we admit the fact of it. The explanation of any phenomenon is always subsequent to the admission of it as a fact, not prior to that admission. All that has been proved is that spirits are necessary to make the facts intelligible at all, and whatever else it may be desirable to know has still to be ascertained and proved. We know very little about the process involved in communication and we have many difficulties *in* the theory, but none *against* it. Readers must learn to distinguish between objections *against* a theory and perplexities or problems *within* it. Nearly all the so-called objections to it, except the possibility of fraud, are not objections at all, but additional problems.

As a consequence of all this I shall take the existence of spirits as proved and endeavor to show what else has been accomplished by psychical research.

There are two difficulties which the layman always sees in the phenomena which we invoke in favor of the spiritistic hypothesis. They are: (1) the triviality of the facts, and (2) the absence of definite knowledge about the nature of the life after death. Both of these are easily removed and would never be mentioned by any scientist.

In regard to triviality of the facts, we have two answers to the layman's difficulties. First, trivial facts are absolutely necessary for the proof of the spiritistic theory. We are not trying to prove that we communicate with the dead. That is a mere incident in the far larger problem of ascertaining whether spirits exist. Materialism is strong enough to require that we prove that spirits exist, and in order to do this we must prove the personal identity of a given person. We must have supernormal facts which illustrate that personal identity, and the more exceptional and trivial they are, the better. Witness what is necessary to prove a murder, or the personal identity of a Tichborne. This claimant for a fortune was not able by any facts to establish his identity, and in the trial appeal was made to very trivial facts like scars on his person, etc. No intelligent person would escape the nature of the problem in such a way as to ignore what the primary condition of proof in it is. Moreover, many of the communications are not trivial at all. This is the second consideration in reply to the alleged difficulties. They are often as exalted in character as anyone would desire, but they are absolutely worthless as evidence for spirits. They are either wholly unverifiable by the only testimony that can be accepted in such cases, or they represent ideas which are easily explicable by subconscious production. We have first to prove the existence of spirits, and then to determine with some measure of accuracy the limits of subconscious production, before we can feel any assurance about many of the alleged messages.

In regard to the absence of knowledge about a future life, it can only be said that there is no lack of communications about it. They are probably as plentiful as the messages in proof of personal identity, and, so far as the persons are honest who furnish the communications, the mass of them is perhaps larger than that of the evidence for survival. The fundamental obstacle to their acceptance is the want of verification. Science can never attach any value to unverified communications from any world, spiritual or physical. What is alleged in any field of inquiry is subject to the laws of evidence and we have not yet been allowed the means for even trying to verify statements about a spiritual world. There are so many contradictory assertions and communications about it that we have to reconcile these

or remove the erroneous ones before we have any right to form a conception of that world.

The real problem for the intelligent man, after obtaining evidence of survival, is to understand the confusions and errors in the communications, and especially the difficulty about transmitting proper names. The explanation of these involves some knowledge of the process of communicating with spirits, or between the dead and the living. Now it is this process which we have not yet ascertained with any degree of clearness or entirety, but we have some hints of what it is in certain types of communication, and further investigation may reveal more of it.

In certain types of mediumship it has been characteristic to represent the communications in the form of a reality like the living. Apparitions are the type of it when spirits purport to be objects of perception and similar representations are given of other objects. The ordinary Philistine, assuming that such alleged messages represent a spiritual world as identical with a material one, is able to cast suspicion on the phenomena, and the conjurer has no difficulty in imitating alleged communications, reproducing the manner of psychics to perfection. But careful records of the personal experiences of private people, who have no professional interest, and experiments with accredited private mediums show the same kinds of phenomena. The mediums apparently see apparitions of persons and objects alike. Everything appears in phantasm, whether symbolically or otherwise, and in so many cases are representative of evidence for the supernormal that there is no mistaking the fact that the messages or communications are pictographic visions. Voices are only an auditory form of the same phenomena.

Now, it has been remarked in the phenomena of both spontaneous and experimental telepathy that the thoughts of A transmitted to B appear to be in the form of apparitions or mental pictures; not always, but frequently enough to suggest what the general process of transmission is. Comparison with mediumistic phenomena shows that the process is the same as in pictographic communications with the dead. But the process, whether between living persons or between the dead and the living, means, in untechnical terms, that the thoughts of A appear as realities to B. Or, to state the same fact technically, the thoughts of the agent,

A, are transmitted telepathically to the percipient, B, in whom they appear as veridical hallucinations. The thoughts or mental pictures of A, become the thoughts or mental pictures of B, to whom they are apparent realities.

It is evident that this fact explains at least most apparitions of both the living and the dead. It may not explain all of them, but it certainly explains most of them, and the whole problem of "spirit clothes" becomes a perfectly simple one. The perplexity of the layman and, more especially, of the scientific man, to whom it is absolutely incredible that we should duplicate our old clothes after death, is greatly modified and, in so far as the miracle of it is concerned, is entirely removed. Many other phenomena yield to this explanation and I shall remark only that of feeling that one's self is another personality. The transfer of emotions, of impulses, or of ideas may disorder the whole equilibrium of the subject that receives them.

The important fact to observe at this juncture is the inference to be drawn as to the nature of the spiritual world. Having eliminated the material reality of the apparitions, and regarding them as telepathic hallucinations produced by the thoughts of the dead, we must conceive the spiritual world as a mental one whose thought has causal power to simulate reality. This phenomenon occurs with the living in their dreams, deliria, hallucinations, and hypnotic suggestions, so that it is not wholly anomalous to find it with the dead. Assuming, with Mr. Myers, that it is the subconscious functions,—which are wholly inutile for the living,—that survive, it would be most natural that the subject surviving should think in pictures that simulate reality; and, telepathy being the mode of transmission to each other and the living, we should expect veridical hallucinations as a consequence, apparent physical realities, but really mental ones simulating them. Thus the spiritual world is a thought world with its ideas and emotions transmissible from person to person.

We might, then, conceive the spiritual world as a rationalized dream life, like poetic day dreaming. Whether it shall be rationalized will depend on the habits of the person while living. Our ordinary dreams seem chaotic and meaningless, but modern psychology shows that they are less chaotic than we are apt to suppose. That

which seems chaotic is only the margin of a more consistent and rational stream in the subconscious that does not emerge in the normal consciousness at all. Even our waking life has this chaotic character, but we disregard it because of our selective interest in certain important portions of it. The marginal associations in it are as chaotic as the marginal constitution of our dreams, which are most probably the fragments of associational events not observed or regarded by the subconscious. Assuming, then, that the subconscious life is a consistent stream, we should have it perpetuating itself in the spiritual world. Our dream life there would be determined by the character which we gave both our conscious and our subconscious life when living. It is our conscious life that determines the contents of the subconscious, so that the habits of the one are the habits of the other. Whether our lives after death will be rationalized dream lives or irrational ones may depend on our habits here. The momentum of our present lives continues, and unless we modify them after death they continue just as they were here. They will be poetic and happy only in accordance with the degree of our adjustment to a rational life.

But now that telepathic agency and communication are accepted or assumed, we find them associated with all sorts of effects on the living. They are not always consciously produced. Many an incident that proves to be good evidence of identity comes unintentionally. The communicator is trying to do one thing, and a different thought slips through. This is because he cannot absolutely control the process of transmission. Everything depends upon which mental picture, the marginal or the central one, is picked up by the receiving agent. But conscious effects can also be produced.

Now take the condition immediately after death; this involves the freeing of the subconscious from the shackles of the bodily life and its sensory action. The dream life of the subconscious goes on just as it did with the living subject and the imagery is taken by this subject for reality, just as we do in our dreams and deliria or hallucinations. This subject comes in contact with a psychic, and his ideas, beliefs, and theories are transmitted to that psychic or through him or her to some living person. It is a dream life communicated to the living and will be nothing but

that subject's ideas and opinions for the time. They will appear as earthly memories projected as beliefs about the spiritual world. Whole philosophies may be transmitted in this way and each communicator would be giving his mere dream life, not representing the reality of the new world in which he is placed, but the merely earthly memories mistaken for the reality of another world, as they are in dreams. It will be perfectly apparent how all this might lead to contradictory accounts of the spiritual world and also to all sorts of obsessions, good and bad. Alleged revelations would occur, good and bad, perhaps, and all sorts of disturbances which we have not time to discuss or prove here.

This continued dream life would have to be reduced to a rational form before it would appear consistent, and even then it might not represent anything but earthly memories. It must be suppressed and a mental life adjusted to the realities of a spiritual world established in the place of the mere dominance of earthly memories, before we could expect any rational account of a spiritual world to be given to us. All that involves very many difficulties for the investigator as yet, and I shall not dwell on it here. The important thing to observe is the lesson which such a view enforces about the habits of the living. They are the key to the solution of the problem quite as much as the fact of communication. If we want the communications to be rational, we shall have to live rational lives. Our habits are the fixed things in our nature, and if they have to be changed after death to suit the new environment, it may be more difficult to change them when out of the body than when in it. Ethical idealism is thus the condition of escaping the unpleasant consequences which are entailed by an irrational life. The more "material," that is, sensory, it is, the more apparently material it will be after death, and all the effects of such habits must be overcome to reach the spiritual development which should begin here. An interest in a non-sensory life, or the subordination of the sensory to an inner life of spiritual ideas, emotions and impulses, is the primary condition of more ready adjustment to a spiritual world, or the production of it, assuming the dream constructiveness of a spiritual life.

This is a mere outline on which the informed psychic

researcher and the philosopher may work to his heart's content. It is a confirmation of the idealism of the last century, though a modification of it at the same time. There is no space to go into any of these problems here. Nor can we as yet dogmatize about the results. We have only opened the gates of another world by communication and by the discovery of one of the methods or processes of communication. There are other than the pictographic processes, but I shall not discuss them here. The main thing is to see in the one method which is most clear the indications of what a spiritual life out of the body may be, and prosecute inquiries until we can reduce the complexities of the phenomena to some sort of order and usefulness in the ethical life of living men to whom the belief in a future life must be of some practical value or lose its interest.

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